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## Honors in Practice: Beyond the Classroom

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Honors in Practice: Beyond the Classroom

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Six years ago, in my first week as director of the Utah State University (USU) Honors Program, a senior physics major and her frustrated faculty mentor marched into my office. The student was shy and embarrassed, the mentor surly and blunt: “Why,” he asked, “must a senior complete an honors contract in a class that isn’t fundamentally shaping her future?” Good question. Because students were required to earn honors credits each term at USU, the choice facing this student was whether to enroll in an honors general education course she did not need or to develop a contract to deepen the work of a non-honors course only tangentially related to her impressive research agenda. The problem was that she had completed her major coursework and was just fulfilling some remaining requirements as she focused outside the classroom on her true academic passions: multi-messenger astronomy, measurement of ambient light pollution, and public science education. She had

recently applied for and won a Goldwater Scholarship for research coupling electromagnetic and gravitational astronomy. She was also collaborating with local city officials to measure and propose solutions to a growing light-pollution problem in our northern Utah valley and volunteering for a range of public science education programs on campus. As she explained how her research, Goldwater application, and community engagement connected to each other, this shy and embarrassed student became animated and expansive, moving me to rethink honors contract rules. If a contract involved additional faculty-mentored academic work beyond course requirements, why did that work have to be connected to a particular course and mentored by its instructor? Indeed, bringing one's curiosity to life—whether through engagement with undergraduate research and creative work, applications for national scholarships and fellowships, or development of collaborative community partnerships—quite clearly defines honors education, in or outside of the classroom.

Around the same time period, the value of active curiosity also shaped the choice of a new USU Honors Program motto, drawn from the poet Horace: "*Sapere aude*," or "Dare to Know." Horace's challenge has become fundamental to Western intellectual history, with notable references by Immanuel Kant—whose 1784 essay "What is Enlightenment?" tied the dare to the liberating power of expansive political reasoning—and Michel Foucault—whose 1984 response (also titled "What is Enlightenment?") critiqued such power with a post-structural examination of the individual subject through a "historical ontology of ourselves" (45). In every case, the dare to know is a challenge not simply to absorb information passively but to pursue knowledge actively with a deep, infectious curiosity. Crucial to honors education here is the fact that curiosity is by definition uncool: it bids one to burn. Honors can and should legitimate such ardor with a curricular license to learn, a mandate to explore academic passions both in and outside the classroom. Richard Badenhansen, this collection's friendly dissenter, warns that contracts risk invalidating the license when they neglect crucial training and curricular support for that mandate: honors programs

and colleges must take responsibility, he rightly contends, for building an intentional honors community, embedding and assessing clear learning outcomes, ensuring both faculty and student equity, and establishing through these practices their own place within campus leadership (5). This concluding chapter counters the charge that contracts are potentially counter-curricular with a reframing question: what if we could productively expand the curriculum by redefining both classroom and community in honors education?

The honors curriculum at Utah State University (USU) was designed specifically to expand those definitions, and the program marks student progress by awarding a total of twenty-eight honors points, which students earn for completion of both credit-bearing honors coursework and faculty-mentored experiential learning outside the classroom. Honors points are visible to both students and advisors in USU's Canvas learning management system, where the honors program has developed a self-paced, cohort-based site that allows assignment uploads and evaluation, points awarding and tracking, and follow-up advising messages. With faculty approval, students prepare themselves for a required capstone project by completing honors courses and experiential contracts, both of which typically earn three honors points. This flexible point-based curriculum values and integrates learning within and without the classroom, a benefit particularly important for our land-grant institution. Gary Wyatt rightly suggests in Chapter Nine that "the alignment of activities with institutional mission documents is an excellent strategy for honors programs and colleges" (202). Aligning itself with USU's mission "to be one of the nation's premier student-centered land-grant and space-grant universities by fostering the principle that academics come first, by cultivating diversity of thought and culture, and by serving the public through learning, discovery, and engagement" (Mission Statement), the honors program includes flexible mentoring agreements (contracts) in its student-centered curriculum to empower talented students from all backgrounds to learn, discover, and engage beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. The program frames these agreements as "Honors in Practice" (HIP) and structures them with clear learning

outcomes that demand mentored honors engagement in the university and local communities. Regardless of course schedules in a given term, honors students can follow their curiosity, putting academic knowledge into practice as they collaborate with faculty and peers on research, creative work, and community-engaged learning.

This approach expands the definitions of both classroom and community. A recent *Atlantic* essay by David Coleman cites a 2014 Gallup/Purdue poll indicating that only three percent of college students have the “types of experiences that ‘strongly relate to great jobs and great lives afterward’: a great teacher and mentor, intensive engagement in activities outside class, and in-depth study and application of ideas.” As high-impact practices at the heart of honors education, engagement beyond the classroom and application of ideas define USU’s HIP experience; this work prepares students to lead the “great lives” that Coleman describes by teaching them to make ideas tangible and actionable for the greater good. Recognizing the dependence of such work on the guidance of what Coleman calls “a great teacher and mentor” and the cost of valuable faculty time, the USU Honors Program has collaborated with the faculty senate and central administration to develop a standardized form with personalized data about faculty honors work; this honors *curriculum vitae* is institutionally recognized in the promotion and tenure process. (See Appendix A.) Honors has also forged other partnerships on and off campus that situate the program, its faculty, and honors students as campus and community leaders who embody USU’s land-grant mission by putting academic ideas into practice. Stretching the limits of both the classroom and the campus community, USU’s HIP empowers students and faculty alike to accept the honors program’s challenge: dare to know.

As the conclusion of a book that maps the history and charts innovative new territory for honors contracts, this chapter aims not to repeat but to synthesize and expand upon the work of preceding chapters. As we have seen, Myers and Whitebread’s careful grounding of contract pedagogy in the history of tutorial education contextualizes a pedagogical practice that Dotter and Hageman

then politicize; their two chapters argue in different ways that contracts create equity and access essential to honors education. These outcomes depend upon the rich, mutually beneficial contract relationships between students and faculty explored in detail by Bambina, Ticknor and Khan, and Snyder and Weisberg. Moving from individual experience to administrative practice, Haseleu and Taylor, Wyatt, Edgington, and Thomas and Hunter all describe how these potentially transformative pedagogical tools might be thoughtfully institutionalized and assessed with clear learning outcomes, streamlined processes, and programmatic oversight. This concluding chapter challenges the conventional definition of contracts as course-based learning with the goal of opening up new possibilities for honors contracts and further discussion about how they might be integrated into honors curricula in creative, functional ways.

### **CASE STUDY:**

#### **HONORS IN PRACTICE AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY**

As the state's land-grant institution, USU aims to make education accessible by bringing knowledge to life for students, faculty, staff, community stakeholders, and the general public. The university's and honors program's demographics reflect both their rural Utah location and an institutional commitment to statewide and regional access. Over the past three years (2017–2020), USU has enrolled an average of 24,722 undergraduates statewide; 16,115 of these students have sought four-year bachelor's degrees on the main (Logan) campus served by the honors program. During this period, 17% of undergraduates on this campus self-identified as first-generation college students, and 10% as underrepresented minorities (URM). Making up about 5% of this main-campus undergraduate population, the honors community of 727 students was a bit more than half as diverse as the institution overall: 10% of all honors students identified as first-generation, and 6% as URM between 2017–2020. Like many other honors programs and colleges, the USU Honors Program has begun the work of creating

more “holistic admissions protocols” to address this inequity (Jones 43), with some success: on average, 12% of the incoming cohort of first-year honors students identified as first-generation and 7% as URM during this three-year period.

The inequity, however, extends well beyond recruitment. The recent NCHC monograph *Occupy Honors Education* (2017), like its precursor *Setting the Table for Diversity* (2010), lays down a challenge for honors educators to combat what Harris and Bensimon have identified as higher education’s “failure to recognize that one’s best practices may not be effective with students who are not familiar with the hidden curriculum of how to be a successful college student” (80), a problem that Badenhausen raises and Dotter and Hageman, in particular, address in this volume. The USU Honors Program has begun to question its own hidden curriculum, to recognize that especially the incoming first-year cohort is “more likely to come from backgrounds of relative privilege as compared to their non-honors peers” (Dziesinski, Camarena, and Homrich-Knieling 83), and thus to train honors faculty and staff “to develop student talent from all communities” (Jones 43).

The impact of this mentored student development is particularly noticeable in the USU Honors Program’s current and transfer student admissions. When faculty and staff understand excellence in broad terms and intentionally guide a range of outstanding undergraduates into the honors community, enrollment of first-generation and racial and ethnic minorities in honors improves, nearly matching institutional levels and exceeding the elevated levels of honors first-year holistic admissions. On average, 18% of current or transfer students admitted to the USU Honors Program between 2017–2020 have identified as first-generation students (compared to 21% of all transfer students admitted to USU and 12% of first-year students admitted to honors), and another 11% as URM (compared to 12% of all transfer students admitted to USU and 7% of first-year students admitted to honors). This preliminary work makes clear the need for systematic collaboration to institutionalize inclusive recruiting practices. At land-grant institutions like USU, such issues are further complicated by the fact

that rural students, as Nadworny and Marcus argue, may very well “need at least as much help in navigating the college experience as low-income, first-generation racial and ethnic minorities from inner cities.” Matching the university’s commitment to educational access with a commitment to diversify and open up the possibility of an honors education to more and differently talented students, the honors program seeks to offer as many students as possible an inclusive liberal arts community at the heart of this large land-grant research university.

The program’s flexible four-part honors curriculum intentionally guides and shapes this liberal arts experience for students with different backgrounds and interests, daring them to discover and explore their academic passions and preparing them to succeed in and beyond college. Such guidance is particularly important for those high-achieving students who find themselves, for various reasons and despite impressive abilities, suddenly lost and confused at a large land-grant research institution. Recognizing that “some students have families with the resources to help them overcome the complexities of college, while others don’t” (Nadworny and Marcus), USU has built an adaptable, reflective honors curriculum that connects students early and often with faculty mentors and thus empowers them to take charge of their own learning in productive ways. With clear and gentle guidance, the program introduces incoming honors students to the power of their own minds and the value of creative thinking through a series of honors general education courses, including an Honors Introductory Experience and a team-taught cross-disciplinary Think Tank, both designed by top professors as hands-on interactive learning laboratories. The students discover how—and why—to build close mentoring relationships with faculty and collaborative teams with peers across disciplines, and they begin to recognize what they can contribute to such relationships.

The honors program broadens the valuable cross-disciplinary community that develops in these courses by curating and distributing a weekly campus-wide academic-events newsletter and requiring students to attend and reflect regularly on the events of



their choice. This requirement pushes students gently outside of their academic comfort zones, asking them to engage regularly with their university community, regardless of individual course schedules, parental expectations, or personal backgrounds. As they reflect in writing on the value of taking these minor controlled “risks” with time that they may have previously reserved for more traditional kinds of homework, honors students develop the confidence to design and complete the HIP projects that put academic ideas into practice. This work, in turn, trains and prepares them for the even greater educational responsibility of completing a capstone project that synthesizes their college experiences and acts as a springboard to future goals.

Refiguring “honors contracts” as “Honors in Practice” has allowed the USU Honors Program to emphasize the experiential value of student-driven, faculty-mentored projects over the transactional exchange of knowledge that Badenhausen insightfully critiques. The HIP part of the curriculum aims “to cultivate critical capacity for unique learners” rather than to provide “a standard curriculum for generic knowers” (Stoller 10), treating knowledge not “as an end in itself” but as “the working capital, the indispensable resources, of further inquiry; of finding out, or learning, more things” (Dewey). Because the process of taking thoughtful control of one’s own learning requires gentle but clear guidance, HIP intentionally builds on the earlier stages of the honors curriculum by requiring students to meet and communicate regularly with faculty mentors, who guide them in shaping and documenting concrete extensions of—and exceptions to—their curricular requirements.

Unlike conventional honors contracts, which engage instructors in mentoring an honors student’s extension of non-honors coursework, HIP at USU can be mentored by any faculty member, on any academic topic, in a time frame agreed upon by student and mentor, which often diverges from the standard time frame of an academic term. Every type of HIP involves substantial mentored work beyond the walls of any classroom and documents that work with a concrete final product, such as a paper, poetry chapbook, poster, lab report, podcast, musical composition, or video, as well

as a focused written reflection on what the student has learned. For most kinds of HIP, students submit, with faculty approval, both a preliminary project proposal and final completion documentation, both of which must address four key honors learning outcomes designed to foster, rather than delimit, student growth. All work in HIP must

1. add to the student's overall education and/or future goals,
2. deepen research or creative experience and demand critical thinking about topics in or around the major,
3. broaden experience across disciplines, and
4. engage with the local and/or global communities.

In addition to the student's proposal for meeting these goals and reflective self-assessment upon completion, the honors program requires a primary faculty mentor (selected by the student), a departmental honors advisor (one faculty member per department, appointed by the honors program), and the honors director (*ex officio*) to read and approve HIP at both the proposal and completion stages. The goal of this three-stage review is to assess whether and how each project adds value to the student's honors education within a specific area of study, the discipline as a whole, and across disciplinary boundaries. This combination of reflective student initiative and supportive faculty engagement creates a collaborative, guided opportunity for student growth. Rather than continuing to follow a standard honors course curriculum over four years, honors students at USU are mentored in charting a curricular path for themselves and reflecting upon how and why their coursework might matter to them, both now and in the future.

Honors at USU helps students to shape their own education by not just breaking but also setting a few ground rules. Students earn three honors points upon completion and faculty approval of each HIP, just as they do when they complete and earn credit for an honors course. They may not, of course, earn honors points for the same work twice, just as they cannot, according to USU's academic honesty/integrity code, submit the same work for credit in different

courses. Students may therefore submit for HIP only work that does not meet the requirements of their honors or non-honors courses, although they may, as at other institutions, develop contracts that extend learning beyond the requirements of a course. Since the aim of HIP is to apply knowledge beyond the classroom, however, one exception to the coursework rule is experiential credit from internships, study abroad, and graduate courses completed as an undergraduate, all of which can be framed as HIP with appropriate mentoring and guidance. For similar reasons, HIP can and should prepare students for capstone projects, but students cannot submit the same work to meet both HIP and capstone requirements in the honors curriculum. This forward-looking approach also defines the role of professional development activities in HIP. The honors program recognizes the financial importance of student applications for department, college, honors, or university scholarships or grants, but because major national and international grant, scholarship, and fellowship applications require significantly more self-assessment, mentoring, revision, research, and sometimes interviewing, only such extensive applications can be proposed as HIP. Similarly, while the program supports a broad range of professionalization activities for students, including conference attendance, public presentations, and other professional development work, only those experiences that include sustained mentoring relationships, concrete final products, and substantial experiential work outside the classroom qualify as HIP.

Because students' course schedules do not necessarily dictate the subject matter of HIP, the possibilities are limited only by the imaginations and time constraints of students and mentors, making careful advising and preparation crucial for student success. Honors professional and peer advisors share with each first-year or entering student the HIP handbook and assignments, discussing possible ideas for projects that might explore or follow the student's academic passions in unexpected ways. Similarly, the honors program offers annual faculty training and faculty-student showcases featuring compelling projects, in addition to broad distribution of the HIP handbook, to ensure a shared understanding of honors

curricular goals. These trainings and showcases build a creative, collaborative community of those engaged in HIP, with space for both students and mentors to discover and reflect upon some of the most innovative work of the past several years. Such projects bring the HIP handbook to life: they range from running a community garden with local refugees to researching Shakespeare at the British Library, from submitting a winning Goldwater Scholarship application to tracking cougars in Logan Canyon, from writing a poetry chapbook to researching and building a working medieval trebuchet. These truly exceptional examples of HIP speak to students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds and with a range of personal and professional goals. Given the freedom to explore, both students and faculty can imagine possibilities and tailor the HIP experience to individual student needs, which include—but can also extend beyond the limits of—more conventional, course-specific honors learning contracts.

The honors program has built upon and extended the sense of collaborative honors community established at HIP showcases by forging several HIP pathways that develop focused communities of honors students and faculty engaged in specific collaborative projects. These structured approaches to HIP include approved graduate “Honors Excel” coursework, an Honors Integrated Research Experience for Undergraduates, Honors Book Labs, the Honors Alumni Mentoring Program, and various student leadership opportunities. Each of these experiences looks to the future in a particular way. The Honors Excel program, for example, allows undergraduates to earn honors points by completing approved graduate-level courses, which quite clearly lead them beyond the usual undergraduate classroom experience. The aim is to empower students to test their undergraduate knowledge by taking the next professional step in a possible academic career. Like other HIP, Honors Excel courses offer students the opportunity to collaborate on cutting-edge research and/or learn about advanced topics in their disciplines with top faculty, graduate students, and honors peers; to complete final products well beyond expectations for undergraduates; and to build mentoring relationships that will continue to develop throughout the student’s

career. Faculty and/or departments are under no obligation to admit honors students to graduate courses; the Honors Excel option simply allows the opportunity when and if a good fit exists between course and student. Since over 50% of graduating USU honors students enroll in graduate or professional programs each year, the aim of Honors Excel is to place students in communities of like-minded peers, graduate students, and faculty so that they can explore and experience graduate school as undergraduates.

Similarly, the program's Honors Integrated Research Experience for Undergraduates (HIREU) creates a collaborative research cohort working in both the lab and the field. The 2019–2020 pilot HIREU engaged a small group of USU honors students across disciplines with honors peers in a year-long intensive study of invasive plants. The experience began with an online training course in the fall, followed by mentored lab research focused on invasive plants in the spring. Before COVID-19 travel restrictions altered plans, the USU honors students were scheduled to participate in an intensive two-week research study abroad trip to a partner institution in Taiwan, where they were to join Taiwanese students in identifying key differences between arid- and tropical-climate invasive plants. That trip has currently been rescheduled for 2021. The HIREU will conclude with a week of cognitive unpacking and reflection upon return. Each part of this experience earns a proportionate number of honors points to mark student progress through the program. The small cohort and structure of this year-long HIP prepare students to develop their own independent research projects in the future.

Honors Book Labs take a very different approach to putting honors into practice by engaging small groups of students and faculty from different disciplines in a four-week reading and discussion experience. The idea is simple: faculty from a range of academic areas propose books, in or outside their areas of expertise, to discuss with honors students. The honors program creates a schedule of Book Labs each term, organizes sign-ups and waitlists with a limit of five students per lab, buys all books for students and faculty, and evaluates student reflections upon completion. Labs meet

four times for an hour per week at the beginning of each term, and students may enroll in one Book Lab per semester as long as they remain in good standing and are making progress toward honors graduation. Book Labs are non-credit-bearing and ungraded, and they follow no set syllabus: faculty can lead them in teams or alone, with guest speakers or field trips, informally or with the structure of their choice. Students are responsible for reading the books, contributing to discussions in the four required meetings, and submitting a detailed reflection within two weeks of completing the lab discussion. These 600-word reflections, which are evaluated by the honors director and earn one honors point upon approval, ask students to consider the nature of this short-term HIP in relation to honors learning outcomes by

1. articulating one *new idea or set of ideas* that they discovered through reading and discussion,
2. giving an example of how the reading and discussion led them to *think critically* about a particular issue or problem,
3. describing the value of discussing this issue or problem *across disciplines* with fellow students and professor(s), and
4. discussing how the Book Lab experience might lead them to *engage with the community or world* in a new way.

Books have ranged from *Alice in Wonderland* to *Massacre at Bear River*, from *Homosexuality and Civilization* to *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. In each case, students discuss ideas openly with peers and professors whom they often do not know. The immense popularity of these labs among both faculty and students suggests a very real desire to engage with and apply ideas beyond the limits of the academic curriculum. The five-student format is particularly adaptable to virtual formats, and the honors program ran a total of 13 Zoom Book Labs designed to engage current students over the summer of 2020.

Honors extends this opportunity for engagement to alumni as well with our Alumni Mentoring Program (AMP), which fosters meaningful relationships between current honors students and alumni with shared professional and/or academic interests. Honors

recruits alumni as potential mentors in the summer and then invites students to sign an agreement and select their own mentors in the fall. Guided by a year-long monthly curriculum, students and mentors communicate by email, phone, video, or even in-person conferences. Students complete assignments and work with their mentors to master four key areas:

1. Professionalism,
2. Applications (job, internship, scholarships),
3. Networking and Professional Development, and
4. Gratitude and Appreciation.

Students must complete all AMP requirements, including thanking their mentors, to remain in good standing with the honors program. Upon submission of a final portfolio including select mentor correspondence, documentation from each of the program's four parts, and a 600-word reflection on the mentoring experience, students earn three honors points, as they would for other kinds of HIP. Their reflections articulate, once again, how this particular HIP met honors learning outcomes by

1. adding to the student's *overall education* and/or *future goals*,
2. demanding *critical thinking* about professional topics connected with the major(s)/minor(s),
3. broadening the student's *experience across disciplines*, and
4. engaging the student in *local or global communities*.

Paired with mentors whose professional experience includes involvement in many top graduate programs and work for the BBC, Google, and the White House, our students develop lasting relationships that situate their current academic work within broader professional contexts and practices.

Much as our alumni help to shape the professional futures of current honors students, the students themselves can help shape the honors experience for their peers through work on the Honors Student Advisory Board (HSAB), composed of one honors student

representative from each of USU's eight colleges. Board members meet monthly, represent honors as ambassadors at recruiting events, participate in honors programming, serve with faculty on cross-disciplinary committees that review incoming student applications, and work alongside the Honors Faculty Advisory Board in evaluating all honors course proposals. Students apply for these appointed positions and serve a (repeatable) term of one academic year. This structured HIP not only engages students in building the honors program on campus but also prepares them to volunteer for our alumni mentoring program after graduation. Upon completion of this year-long leadership experience, students earn three points by submitting a final portfolio that includes a log of programming participation and meeting attendance, a summary of recruiting and ambassadorial work for the honors program, and a 600-word reflection. Tied once again to honors learning outcomes, these reflections describe how HSAB work has

1. added to the student's *overall education* and/or future goals through the development of leadership and ambassadorial skills,
2. demanded *critical thinking* about the relationship between the student's major college and other colleges and programs on campus,
3. broadened the student's experience across disciplines by building *relationships* among students on the board and between students and honors program staff, and
4. engaged the student in the *campus* and *broader communities* through the ambassadorial role.

Once again, this honors leadership experience puts knowledge about both one's discipline and the university community into practice and thus gives HSAB members control of their own educational development, even as they help other honors students to develop and grow.

By building community, teaching self-awareness, and systematically assessing learning outcomes, these HIP pathways train



independent learners and ensure equity and access for all honors students, regardless of previous academic or extracurricular experience. Part of the mission of Honors in Practice is to teach young adults to define and articulate the value of their education to anyone who may not understand. By helping them to write their personal success stories in small cohorts and with careful mentoring, the honors program builds confident students and an inclusive curriculum with real-world value. In pursuit of these goals, the program has more recently designed three additional cohort-based approaches to HIP: the Honors Leadership Academy, the Honors Dare to Know Global Engagement Experience, and the Honors Sustainability Lab. As a pathway not only to other HIP but also to the Honors Student Advisory Board, the leadership academy creates an apprenticeship model that prepares first- and second-year students for leadership roles in their final college years. Still in the planning stages, the global engagement HIP experience will similarly focus on early-career honors students: this year-long cohort study of scientific and humanistic knowledge and discovery for first-year first-generation students will culminate in an Enlightenment-focused European study abroad experience. The Honors Sustainability Lab, also in development, will be run by faculty members who involve students in community-engaged sustainability work by building teams and forging collaborative relationships with specific community partners. Through cohort work, these new pathways guide students in developing the confidence and skill to work independently on the projects of their choice.

Students and faculty can engage imaginatively with more independent self-structured HIP only when they fully understand the possibilities, purpose, and requirements of this experiential part of the honors curriculum. In addition to the honors HIP structures described above, the program has thus built a series of self-paced, online HIP modules designed to guide students as they complete their first honors semester and prepare to engage in HIP. This online guidance is modeled on an existing, highly successful honors capstone preparation course, which was developed in 2017. The one-credit pass-fail pre-capstone course meets in person twice per

term to establish the incoming capstone cohort; the online portion of this hybrid course prepares juniors to submit their own capstone proposals by first asking them to read and reflect upon strong honors capstone proposals, projects, and public presentations in their disciplines. In the HIP training, which runs alongside a parallel series of faculty training tutorials, students can similarly examine past examples of HIP work as they prepare to design their own projects. The combination of HIP showcases, pathways, and these online tutorials extends the USU's Honors Program's "Dare to Know" to more students and faculty and makes the HIP part of the curriculum more productive and meaningful for all.

The ultimate goal here is to expand the boundaries of the classroom and the honors community by developing, documenting, and showcasing the strengths of all stakeholders in HIP work. The honors program demonstrates the impact of this work to students, faculty, and institutional administrators with specific forms of documentation that lead directly and clearly to professional development. For students, HIP proposals and completion documentation build a growing portfolio of extracurricular achievements even as they cultivate the reflective skill necessary to describe the personal and professional value of that work. (Appendices B and C include sample forms.) As students collaborate with faculty and the honors program to identify projects and articulate the value of research or creative work, they learn through HIP to advocate for themselves in the present and future. To support the faculty who mentor students through this developmental process, the honors program has worked with institutional leadership to embed the value of HIP and capstone mentoring, honors teaching, and honors service in faculty code, job descriptions, and promotion documentation. (Appendix A includes a template.) By foregrounding and institutionalizing the professional importance of this honors work, the program has raised its profile on campus; developed crucial partnerships with colleges, departments, and other units; and incentivized faculty to engage in work that they already find personally rewarding and professionally enriching. The idea of a personalized, yet standardized honors *curriculum vitae*, recognized and rewarded by the institution's central

promotion and tenure committee, President, and Board of Trustees, has been a particularly important way to document the quality and quantity of honors faculty mentoring and service work. Annual public awards, which include honoraria for outstanding teaching (nominated and chosen by honors students), mentoring (for faculty supervising award-winning capstone work), and service (chosen as a Friend of Honors), foreground the program's appreciation of all forms of faculty engagement. The Utah State University Honors Program leads the campus in creative, collaborative partnerships supporting faculty equity, and the director has collaborated with other programs and departments interested in developing similar faculty reward systems. Such imaginative high-impact leadership has made the USU Honors Program a sought-after and valued partner for institutional collaboration.

### **BEYOND UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY: ARE HONORS CONTRACTS FOR YOU?**

Honors in Practice is fundamental to the land-grant mission of USU because this work applies academic learning, connects students with outstanding teachers and mentors, and develops the "Citizen Scholars" whom USU's general education curriculum promises to train. A fundamental premise of HIP is that the best honors contracts intentionally prepare students for a meaningful future by engaging them firmly and thoughtfully in the present. Whether this work focuses on the near future (exploration of academic interests, research, creative apprenticeships, community or global engagement, or capstone preparation) or a long-term plan (national fellowship applications, internships, professional development, research, or graduate coursework), the structured requirements of HIP add depth and meaning to projects and activities that typically appeal to outstanding students. More than many other college graduates, students who bring their intellectual passions to life, engage collaboratively with their mentors, and reflect upon the value of their own applied-learning projects understand the value of their undergraduate experience and can articulate

that value to others. Students and faculty who perceive Honors in Practice as a series of worthwhile milestones on the path toward short- and long-term goals will reliably design experiences that add to and deepen an honors education, both at the institution and beyond.

All of the writers in this volume have called for a proactive approach to putting honors into practice. Even Badenhausen's objections rest upon the need for such thoughtful action: the institutional leadership role of honors programs and colleges depends upon their ability to identify and share best practices in meeting and assessing learning outcomes, fostering community, and modeling equity. While each chapter's ideas may or may not apply directly to a particular curriculum, readers have already heeded the volume's call to action by attending to the conversation thoughtfully started by its contributors. The overarching goal of the collection is to engage the reader's imagination with a range of flexible, experiential, and practical blueprints for building honors contracts. When students put honors into practice, whether within or without the bounds of established coursework, they choose their own adventures and map their own undergraduate paths. More broadly, the outward-looking, engaged approach to contract learning described in each of this volume's chapters transforms students into lifelong learners equipped to shape their own personal and professional futures. By challenging students, faculty, staff, and administrators to follow their curiosity and to lead others toward collaborative discovery, the best honors contracts take up and deliver on Horace's dictum: *Sapere aude*—or dare to know. That challenge is central to honors education, regardless of how honors educators decide to structure their curricula.

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## APPENDIX A

## Utah State University Honors Program Faculty Honors *Curriculum Vitae*

USU faculty may request a personalized *curriculum vitae* of honors work at any time. The honors program verifies the faculty member's relevant teaching/mentoring, service, and awards and inserts terms and descriptions of that work to personalize the general template below. USU's Provost and Faculty Senate have approved this format and recognize this documentation as part of promotion and tenure dossiers. The italicized, standardized language below explains the nature and value of each kind of work. Only relevant categories appear on each *curriculum vitae*, and the non-italicized text is personalized to reflect each faculty member's engagement with the honors program.

### **Teaching**

*The Utah State University Policy Manual identifies "honors or other independent study work" as documentation of teaching performance for core faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion (USU Policy 405.2.2), professional career and technical education faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion (USU Policy 405.5.2), and term faculty seeking promotion (USU Policy 405.10.1). The University Honors Program depends upon faculty work with honors students and therefore documents this work for the purposes of tenure and/or promotion, upon request.*

**Honors Course Teacher** *(The University Honors Program requires all students to complete three honors core courses, all of which feature a high level of faculty-student interaction. These courses can include honors general education classes, special honors sections of departmental classes, or honors special topics courses.)*

- **Year (Term):** Course name, general education designation, and number of credits
- [continue . . . list most recent courses taught first]

*DUTIES OF HONORS COURSE TEACHER: 1) Serve as the instructor for an honors course (typically three credits); 2) Ensure that the course teaches and integrates the four key skills required by the honors program: critical thinking, independent research, interdisciplinary learning, and civic engagement; 3) Meet regularly and individually with students outside of class, fostering both mastery of course material and broader academic success; 4) Provide prompt, detailed feedback on all assignments; 5) Support the program by attending honors events, advocating for the program, and recruiting talented honors students.*

**Honors Capstone Mentor** (*Honors capstones are major student research or creative projects that require at least one term of independent study with a faculty mentor.*)

- **Year (Term):** Student's name, "Title of Capstone Project"
- [continue . . . list most recent graduates first]

*DUTIES OF HONORS CAPSTONE MENTOR: 1) Serve as the instructor for a three-credit independent-study capstone course; 2) Mentor students in writing the capstone proposal; 3) Meet regularly with students and committees; 4) Train students in research best practices; 5) Provide prompt, detailed feedback on drafts; 6) Help students find venues for public presentation; 7) Work with students to ensure polished final products.*

**Honors Capstone Committee Member** (*Honors capstones are major student research or creative projects that require at least one committee member, in addition to the Honors Capstone Mentor.*)

- **Year (Term):** Student's name, "Title of Capstone Project"
- [continue . . . list most recent graduates first]

*DUTIES OF HONORS CAPSTONE COMMITTEE MEMBER: 1) Comment on and approve capstone proposals; 2) Meet regularly with students and mentors; 3) Provide prompt, detailed feedback when requested; 4) Work with students and mentors to ensure polished final products.*

**Honors Contract Mentor** (*Honors contracts are independent student projects mentored by a faculty member. Instruction of an approved honors student in an Honors Excel graduate course qualifies as mentorship of one Honors contract. Each project applies academic knowledge in practical ways and requires at least 20 hours of student work outside the classroom.*)

- **Year (Term):** Student's name, "Title of Contract"
- [continue . . . list most recent graduates first]

*DUTIES OF HONORS CONTRACT MENTOR: 1) Mentor students in writing contract proposal (design content for Honors Excel course); 2) Guide students in professional completion of contracted work; 3) Meet students regularly throughout the contract; 4) Provide prompt, detailed feedback on student work and/or final products.*

**Supervised Teaching Activity/Honors UTF** (*Honors hires Undergraduate Teaching Fellows (UTFs) for our Introductory Experience and Think Tank General Education courses. USU's stated expectation for UTFs is that they "assist faculty mentors with day-to-day classroom management and teaching tasks and help their*

*fellow students by providing assistance with their coursework. UTFs should meet with their faculty mentors . . . , [and] the average time commitment to work as a UTF is 15 hours per week. Meeting regularly with and mentoring these UTFs in pedagogical work is required of all honors instructors.)*

- **Year (Term):** Student's name, Course Number "Course Title" (General Education Designation), Award (if student earned award recognition for outstanding work as a UTF)

**Honors Book Lab Mentor** *(Each term, the University Honors Program offers students the opportunity to join four-week, five-person, cross-disciplinary reading groups led by volunteer faculty who have chosen the book and lead discussions.)*

- **Year (Term):** Book Title by Author Name

*DUTIES OF HONORS BOOK LAB MENTOR: 1) Propose book and write description for student recruiting; 2) Coordinate scheduling with University Honors Program staff; 3) Meet with students four times, one hour per week in weeks two through five of the term; 4) Lead cross-disciplinary discussions for honors students, who reflect upon that experience for honors points.*

### **Service**

*The Utah State University Policy Manual identifies "membership in, and leadership of, departmental, college and university committees and organizations" as evidence of service for core faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion (USU Policy 405.2.2), professional career and technical education faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion (USU Policy 405.5.2), and term faculty seeking promotion (USU Policy 405.10.1). The University Honors Program depends upon faculty engagement at the department, college, and university levels and therefore documents this work for the purposes of tenure and/or promotion, upon request.*

**Honors Faculty Advisory Board** *(The University Honors Program appoints one faculty representative from each college (including Libraries) to offer a faculty perspective on programmatic issues. Board membership is reviewed and updated annually, and the Associate Vice President for Research (undergraduate) serves ex officio on the board.)*

- **Year:** College of XXX Representative

*DUTIES OF HONORS FACULTY ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS: 1) Represent college interests at board meetings and provide college-specific feedback on program initiatives and ideas; 2) Participate in (and recruit other college faculty for) the University Honors Program admissions process by evaluating and discussing incoming and*

current/transfer applications; 3) Advocate for the University Honors Program within the college and communicate with faculty and administrators about the value and goals of the program; 4) Participate in University Honors Program events and create a sense of honors community at the college level.

**Departmental Honors Advisor** (*The University Honors Program appoints one faculty representative from each department to serve as point of contact for all honors students and faculty in the department. Service in this role is reviewed and updated annually.*)

- **Year:** Department of XX, College of YY

*DUTIES OF DEPARTMENTAL HONORS ADVISORS: 1) Provide department-specific input about the University Honors Program; 2) Communicate regularly with the University Honors Program Executive Director to ensure accurate advising of students; 3) Serve as a committee member on departmental capstone projects (see teaching above); 4) Review and offer feedback on students' contract proposals within the department; 5) Advise department students about capstones, contracts, and other opportunities in the field; 6) Advocate for the University Honors Program within the department and communicate with faculty and administrators about the value and goals of the program; 7) Participate in University Honors Program events and create a sense of honors community at the department level.*

**Honors Committee Membership** (*The University Honors Program invites faculty to serve on a variety of committees for the purposes of scholarship review, holistic admissions review, etc.*)

- **Year:** Honors XXX Committee Member

*DUTIES OF HONORS COMMITTEE MEMBERS: 1) Attend committee meetings, as scheduled; 2) Use provided rubrics and spreadsheets to review, as necessary; 3) Contribute faculty and disciplinary perspectives to group conversations; 4) Respond to University Honors Program staff in a timely and efficient manner.*

### **Awards and Honors**

*The Utah State University Policy Manual (USU Policy 405) identifies the teaching and service work outlined below as performance documentation for faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion. The University Honors Program depends upon and recognizes exceptional faculty engagement in these areas with select annual awards, including the Friend of Honors, Honors Outstanding Professor (presents Honors Last Lecture), and Outstanding Capstone Mentor. Brief descriptions of awards follow each award given.*

- **Year:** Friend of Honors Award (*Each year, the University Honors Program recognizes a faculty member whose service as a teacher, mentor, and community member demonstrates an exceptional commitment to honors education. Award winners model and mentor critical thinking, independent research, interdisciplinary learning, and community engagement for students, and are thus crucial to the mission of the University Honors Program.*)
- **Year:** Honors Outstanding Professor (*Each year, honors students nominate faculty, and a committee of honors students interviews nominees and selects an Honors Outstanding Professor, who delivers the Honors Last Lecture in the fall. These faculty have made an impact on students, both in and outside the classroom, through their teaching and mentorship.*)
- **Year:** Outstanding Capstone Mentor (*Each year, the University Honors Program recognizes two outstanding student capstones, one in STEM and one in other fields. This award commends mentors of these exceptional projects for their active mentorship and guidance of this remarkable work.*)

## APPENDIX B

## Utah State University Honors Program Honors Mentoring Agreement Proposal

An Honors Mentoring Agreement (“contract”) is a formal agreement between a student, a mentor, the DHA, and Honors to complete an Honors in Practice experience. Each agreement proposes—and then documents the student’s completion of—an academic or professional project that extends learning beyond regular coursework. Students earn **3 honors points** for every successfully proposed, completed, and approved project, and these projects require a minimum of 20 hours of work outside the classroom. The *Honors in Practice Handbook* and the University Honors Program (UHP) Canvas course (for students) include detailed descriptions of the types and uses of Honors Mentoring Agreements (HMA), as well as student and faculty responsibilities and step-by-step instructions.

Student’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Graduation Semester/Year \_\_\_\_\_

Major(s) and/or Minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Student’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
(*verifies understanding of contract requirements*)

Contract Start/End Dates or Term \_\_\_\_\_

Project Title (or course dept., #, and title) \_\_\_\_\_

Is this an internship ☐ or study abroad ☐?

ESTIMATED TOTAL WORK HOURS \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor’s Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor’s Email \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor’s Department \_\_\_\_\_

Departmental Honors Advisor’s Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(*Mentor and DHA signatures verify reading and approval of proposal.*)

Dept. Faculty Honors Advisor’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(*or attach email indicating approval*)

### REQUIREMENTS

Honors Mentoring Agreements (HMA) are for **honors students only** and are valid only if proposed and approved before the project begins and documented and approved upon completion.

- At the beginning of the project, the mentor and DHA indicate project approval by reading the HMA Proposal and signing this form. Honors approval then follows upon submission and review of the signed proposal in the UHP Canvas course.
- All HMAs must result in a concrete final product (poster, report, paper, PowerPoint, photo documentation, work log, etc.) and a 500–600 word reflective essay about this experience of Honors in Practice (HIP).
- Students must complete the HMA by the stated deadline or communicate changes in timeline with the mentor, DHA, and Honors.
- HMAs need not be connected to a course, but if they are, only **upper-division courses** are acceptable. The work for these agreements is not graded and does not affect the course grade, but students must pass any class associated with an HMA.

## WORK

HMAs enrich a student's academic experience beyond normal coursework. Each HMA demands a minimum of **20 hours** of work beyond normal coursework. Students may complete more than one HMA for an extensive project, but each part of that longer project must be proposed, approved, and completed as its own agreement. The student and mentor must meet (outside of class) **at least twice per month (minimum six times per semester)** to discuss the project. Students report meeting dates upon completion.

## PROPOSAL

Please indicate if HMA fulfills Honors Excel ☐ **or** Community-Engaged Scholar ☐ **or** Global Engagement Scholar ☐ **or** Undergraduate Research ☐ requirements—if so, explain how the agreement meets those requirements in #1.

The proposal includes two parts: 1) a **brief project overview**, including key **goals**, proposed **work** and **timeline**, and description of **final product** (beyond required reflection); and 2) a **detailed rationale** for how the HMA meets honors learning outcomes by adding to student's **overall education** or **future goals**, deepening **research** experience in major or demanding **critical thinking** about major topics, broadening **experience across disciplines**, and engaging student in the **local or global community**.

**APPROVAL:** *Students must upload complete proposals with signed forms in the UHP Canvas course; Honors approves or denies all HMAs and awards points only after successful contract completion and upload of all completion documentation.*

## APPENDIX C

## Utah State University Honors Program Honors Mentoring Agreement Completion

Students earn 3 honors points upon upload and final Honors approval of this completed form (with all signatures), the final product of the Honors Mentoring Agreement (“contract”), and a 500–600 word reflection in the University Honors Program (UHP) Canvas course. Students should address each point below and share all documentation with the mentor and Departmental Faculty Honors Advisor, who sign this form to indicate approval of the project and documentation.

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Graduation Semester/Year \_\_\_\_\_

Major(s) and/or Minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*(Student's signature verifies accuracy of all information included on this form.)*

Project Title (or course dept., #, and title) \_\_\_\_\_

Is this an internship ☐ or study abroad ☐?

Mentoring Agreement Start/End Dates or Term \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor's Department \_\_\_\_\_

Departmental Honors Advisor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dept. Faculty Honors Advisor's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*(or PRINT NAME ABOVE and attach email indicating approval)*

***Faculty signatures indicate that the Honors Mentoring Agreement (HMA) has been completed to the mentor's and DHA's satisfaction and that they have seen the final product and reflection.***

Was this an Honors Excel HMA? ☐ Yes ☐ No If “yes,” please skip to #3 below.

1. List the dates of student-mentor meetings outside of class (minimum **six** times; mentor must approve by signing above):

\_\_\_\_\_



For study abroad or internships, check here to verify daily mentor meetings. ☐

2. How many hours did the HMA take to complete? \_\_\_\_\_ hours

*\*NOTE: 20-hour minimum; HMAs may be extended by working with honors staff.*

3. Students must **attach a 500–600 word reflection**, outlining how the HMA put academic **knowledge into practice** (the aim of all Honors Mentoring Agreements) and created a meaningful **relationship with the mentor**. The reflection must specifically address how the **HMA work met honors learning outcomes** by 1) adding to the student's overall education and/or future goals, 2) deepening research experience within the major and/or demanding critical thinking about topics in the major, 3) broadening the student's experience across disciplines, and 4) engaging the student in the local or global community.

*\* NOTE: For Honors Excel graduate courses, students should indicate how the class and assignments have deepened understanding of graduate-level work and helped to shape future plans (covering topics above).*

4. All HMAs require solid evidence of the work completed over the course of the project. Students should briefly summarize below the content, format, and personal value of that final product, and then attach that final product to this form (for faculty endorsement) and upload to Canvas (for final Honors approval).

**APPROVAL:** *Students must upload all completion documentation (with signatures) in the Honors Canvas course; Honors awards points upon approval of that documentation.*